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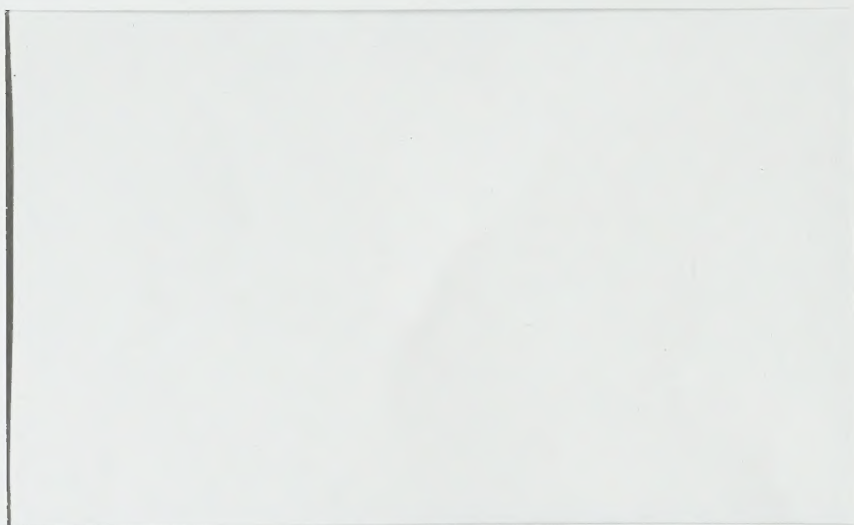
**CANADA'S VOLUNTARY SECTOR:  
HISTORY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS**

*Current Issue Paper #177*



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## CANADA'S VOLUNTARY SECTOR: HISTORY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout Canada's history, voluntarism has played a central role in the maintenance of the country's social fabric. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, volunteers and the philanthropic organizations they established provided most of what today would be considered social welfare services. Prevailing beliefs held that the role of government should be limited and that individual responsibility was of prime importance. While public attitudes towards the role of government in the provision of social welfare changed over the course of the Great Depression and the Second World War, voluntarism continued to play a pivotal role in supporting the vast array of public services available in post-war Canadian society. The fiscal crisis experienced in the last decades of this century has placed a renewed interest in voluntarism and community organizations, as fiscally-strapped governments look for alternative means of providing public services.

This Current Issue Paper examines the role of voluntarism in Canada, focusing particularly on the relationship between volunteers and the provision of public services. After a brief history of voluntarism, the paper provides an overview of voluntarism in Canada today, focusing on the voluntary labour force, volunteer demographics and participation rates. The paper concludes by examining some of some current expectations of voluntarism and some possible ways of encouraging Canadians to volunteer in the future.

A preliminary note on terminology.<sup>1</sup> Volunteer work can be either formal or informal. Formal volunteer work is marked by activity conducted through a recognized organization frequently assisted by paid staff. It is often performed on a regular or planned basis and involves a degree of commitment to the host organization. Informal volunteer work, by contrast, is performed without an intermediary organization and is typically more spontaneous and temporary. It generally consists of helping a friend or neighbour in need. In both cases, the distinguishing feature of a voluntary act is that it is done of free will and without any expectation of direct monetary reward. In this paper, all references to volunteer work relate to work carried out in the formal sense of the term.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF VOLUNTARISM IN CANADA

At the time of Confederation, volunteers provided most of the services which today would be considered part of our publicly-funded and administered social safety net. Voluntarism assumed such a prominent role because of prevailing beliefs in nineteenth-century Canada about the limited role of government and the social responsibilities of citizens. These beliefs held that the private market operated with a rough kind of justice, rewarding work and thrift and punishing indolence and unproductive behavior. There was seen to be no need for publicly-provided welfare services because individuals who pursued





honest work should be able to “claim their fair share of needed goods and services through the market system...”.<sup>2</sup> The limited public services which were available to the disadvantaged were provided by philanthropically-disposed citizens and groups - including churches - who tended to believe that poverty was not always the product of indolence. Unfortunately, “the ad hoc nature of many charitable organizations, which waxed and waned depending on economic conditions, the season of the year, or the advent of such calamities as typhoid epidemics, fostered a crisis-oriented approach to community services” which often frustrated relief efforts.<sup>3</sup>

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Canadian governments began to make inroads in the field of social welfare. One of the first major steps taken in Ontario was the passage of the *Children’s Protection Act* in 1893. Under the Act, publicly-mandated child welfare services were to be delivered by the volunteer-based Children’s Aid Society. The Society itself was an outgrowth of three community-based, volunteer initiatives spearheaded by the Globe reporter-turned-social reformer J.J. Kelso: the Children’s Fresh Air Fund, the Santa Claus Fund and the Toronto Humane Society. Kelso described the purpose of the Children’s Aid Society as:

... a flexible instrument for protecting neglected children in their own homes, for arranging the care of those lacking proper homes, and for bringing to the attention of the general public and of public officials situations affecting the welfare of children which required remedial action.<sup>4</sup>

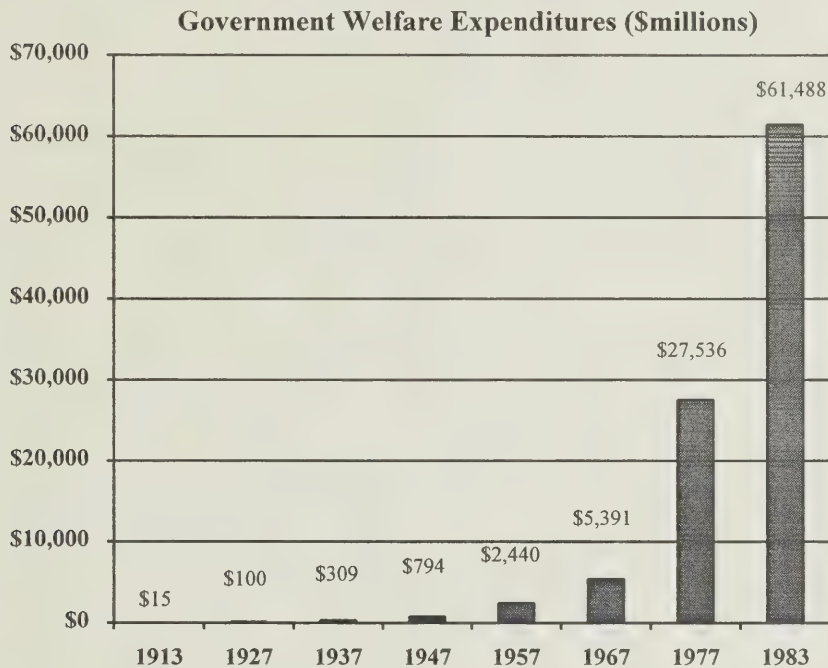
The *Children’s Protection Act* gave the Society through its local officials broad powers to remove children from dangerous and cruel situations, supervise and manage municipal child shelters and assume legal guardianship of children committed to them by the courts.<sup>5</sup> The Children’s Aid Society remains the primary organization through which children’s protection services are provided in Ontario today. While specially-trained professionals perform many of the duties which volunteers performed a century ago, volunteers continue to play an integral role in the Society’s operations.

Voluntarism remained a central force behind the provision of public services for the first third of this century, despite the growing roles of provincial and municipal governments in the regulation, administration, provision and funding of social welfare services. Evangelical social work organizations, such as the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), provided cheap and respectable accommodation for young women in cities like Toronto and Ottawa, were almost entirely funded by the churches which sponsored them and staffed by church volunteers.<sup>6</sup>





In the 1930s, the Great Depression illustrated dramatically the need for governments to expand their role in the administration, regulation, provision and funding of public services in Canada. The affluence afforded by industrial activity during and after the Second World War allowed all three levels of governments to expand these roles, and in the process largely eclipse the private system of public welfare in Canada. The following graph illustrates the rise in government expenditures on health and social welfare in this century:



Source: Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985).

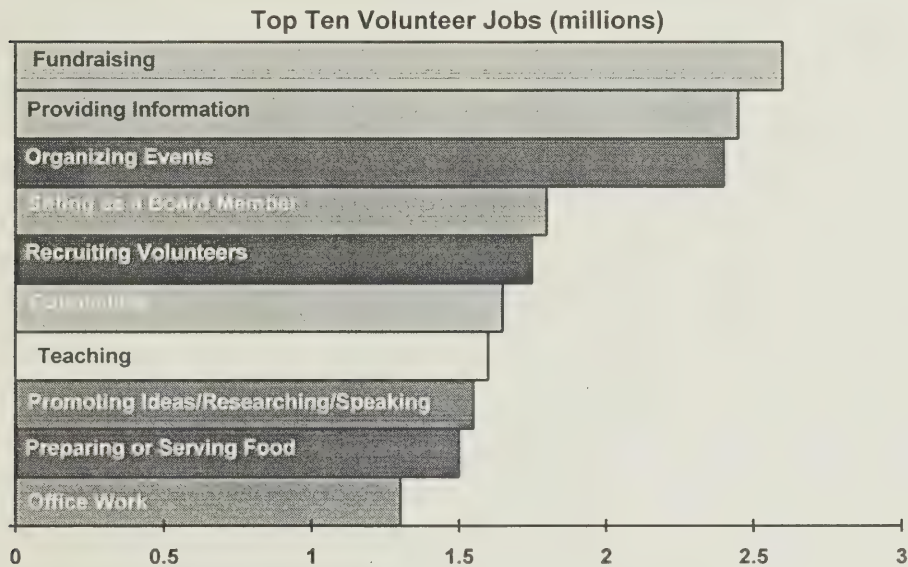
Canadian governments' increased expenditures were not alone in displacing volunteers from the provision of public services: since the Second World War, an increased professionalization of public services in general has meant that only those individuals with special training are allowed by law and other regulations (i.e., insurance) to deliver public services. Sectors affected by this include social work, health care and education.

Despite these forces, volunteers have remained an important source of support for the delivery of public services in the post-war period.<sup>7</sup> The importance of volunteers is evident in groups such as the Children's Aid Society, the John Howard and Elizabeth Fry Societies, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, and the YMCA - all of whom receive the lion's share of their programme funding from governments and yet rely upon volunteers for a significant portion of their labour.



## RECENT TRENDS IN CANADIAN VOLUNTARISM

According to the most recent statistics, approximately five million Canadians volunteer their time and skills to groups and organizations across the country - two million of them in Ontario.<sup>8</sup> The majority of the activities performed by volunteers are related to the overall administration of organizations as opposed to the services provided. As shown below, the minority of activities performed by volunteers which are related to services or programmes typically involve teaching, counseling and preparing and serving food. This graph does not illustrate the time spent by volunteers at these jobs:



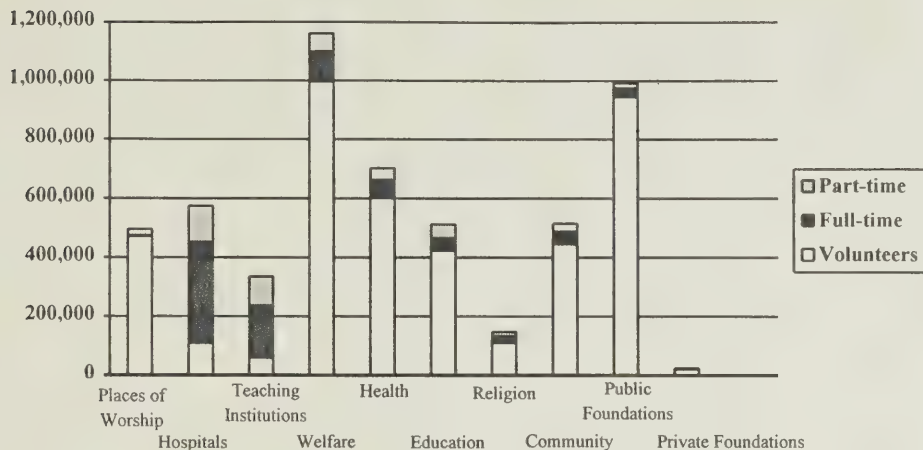
Note: The number of jobs performed in this graph is greater than the number of volunteers because many volunteers do more than one job. Source: Statistics Canada, *Giving Freely: Volunteers in Canada*, Cat.no.71-535 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1989), p.47.

The following graph shows the proportion of volunteers compared to paid staff within various charitable institutions:





### Charitable Organizations: Labour Force Composition

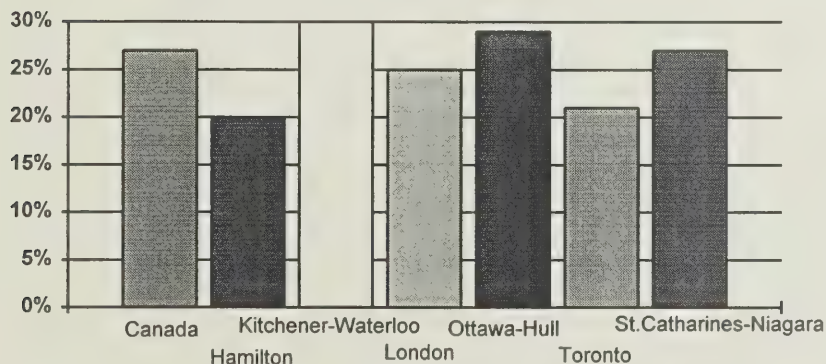


Source: David Sharpe, *A Portrait of Canada's Charities* (Toronto: Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 1993).

It is interesting to note the contrast between the low proportion of volunteers in hospitals and teaching institutions and the high proportion in welfare and public foundations.

The following graph shows the participation rates for voluntary activities in selected Ontario cities:

### Volunteer Participation Rates



Source: Canada, Statistics Canada, *Giving Freely: Volunteers in Canada*, Cat. no.71-535 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1989), pp.18-19.

It is interesting to note that only 21 percent of Torontonians volunteer their time. Torontonians were also distinguished by the fact that 125,000 more women than men volunteered - the largest discrepancy of this kind in the country.





Almost half of all volunteers are in the 25 to 44 age group, with one quarter of volunteers aged 45 to 64. Other facts related to the demographic composition of Canadian volunteers are summarized in the following table:

Characteristic	Volunteers as a Proportion of Total Volunteers	Volunteers as a Proportion of Total Population	Average Hours Volunteered per Week
<b>Age</b>			
15-24 yrs	12%	18%	3.4
25-44 yrs	49%	31%	3.6
45-64 yrs	28%	29%	4.2
Over 65 yrs	11%	22%	4.2
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Married	73%	31%	3.5
Single	17%	19%	3.7
Other	10%		
<b>Education</b>			
No Secondary	8%	13%	4.4
High School	46%	24%	3.7
Some Postsecondary	10%	31%	3.1
Diploma	17%	35%	3.7
University	19%	46%	3.5
<b>Income</b>			
< \$10,000	5%	18%	5.1
\$10-19,999	13%	21%	4.2
\$20-29,999	14%	26%	3.4
\$30-39,999	20%	31%	3.6
\$40-59,999	21%	34%	3.4
>\$60,000	13%	40%	3.4
Not stated	14%	20%	
<b>Labour Force Status</b>			
Employed	63%	27%	3.4
Unemployed	4%	23%	3.9
Out of Force	32%	25%	4.2
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	57%	30%	3.5
Male	43%	24%	3.8

Source: Statistics Canada, *Giving Freely: Volunteers in Canada*, Cat. No.71-535 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1989).

## THE FUTURE OF VOLUNTARISM

Fiscal constraints over the past few years have led some governments to look to voluntarism as one possible way to lower the costs of providing public services. This idea is not new. In 1973, for example, the Committee on Government Productivity (COGP) encouraged the Ontario government to adopt a policy of "selective reprivatization of programme delivery" so as to "tap community skills and resources as are found in non-profit organizations, in private, profit-oriented corporations and in community corporations organized by special interest groups."<sup>9</sup> More recently, the Government of Ontario announced in the 1995 Throne Speech a new initiative to promote and encourage voluntarism in the province.<sup>10</sup>



Can governments expect volunteers to provide a wider array of public services? As information presented in the second part of this paper suggests, only a minority of volunteers actually participate in the delivery of public services and programmes. This is because many organizations which rely upon volunteer labour (i.e., hospitals, schools and social service agencies) do so only in a support capacity. There are a number of reasons for this. First, most volunteers do not have the skills required to perform specialized service delivery functions, such as providing health care to the chronically-ill or aged. Second, most organizations are required by law and insurance regulations to have only trained professionals provide services. If volunteers replaced trained professionals in this capacity, the service organizations could be held liable and insurance rates could rise. In short, as Smith and Lipsky note, “voluntarism is inadequate as a policy response when specialized skills are required to address social needs...The informal sector must be ‘interwoven’ with the formal sector if effective, sound policy is to be developed.”<sup>11</sup>

Even if volunteers could provide a wider array of public services, it is not at all clear that Canadians themselves are willing and able to do so. A recent survey noted that only 27 percent of volunteers are willing to donate more time than they presently do. While an additional 42 percent indicated they too would volunteer more time, they said that they would do so only in an emergency situation. The 39 percent of respondents who said they could not volunteer more time claimed the lack of free time prevented them from doing so.<sup>12</sup>

So what can governments reasonably expect of volunteers? At present, most volunteers help organizations in support service roles, such as administrative support, fundraising, public relations or executive decision-making. It is these types of jobs - and not those related to the actual delivery of services and programmes - which fiscally-strapped governments could expect to be expanded if Canadians wanted to or could volunteer more time. These types of jobs, however, may not help voluntary community organizations preserve their services in the face of reduced funding.

What might allow and/or encourage Canadians to donate more of their time to these types of volunteer activities? As noted above, one of the largest constraints upon volunteer activity is the lack of free time and one of the most important factors contributing to Canadians’ lack of free time is the existing structure of work. With two-thirds of volunteers currently in the workplace, the time constraints imposed by work can certainly place serious constraints upon volunteer activities. One way to reduce these constraints is through corporate volunteer initiatives, which the second half of this section explores in more detail.





A more general constraint upon volunteer activity is social attitudes and beliefs towards voluntarism. As indicated earlier in this paper, less than one-fifth of Canadians donate time to formal volunteer activities. While it is unreasonable to expect all Canadians to volunteer in some formal capacity, there is reason to believe that more Canadians could donate time given such a low participation rate. One way to encourage Canadians to do so is through expanded community service learning, which is examined in the second half of this section.

### **Corporate Volunteer Initiatives**

Corporate volunteer initiatives are designed to improve the skill and experience level of the volunteer labour pool and improve businesses' relationship with the communities in which they operate. Unfortunately, a recent survey of small- to medium-sized businesses reported that even though most supported employee volunteer initiatives in some way, the level of support decreased as the level of commitment and cost of that support increased.<sup>13</sup> The following table illustrates this point using some of the results of this survey:



<b>Corporate Volunteer Initiative</b>	<b>% Support</b>
Permit posting of information on voluntary organizations and initiatives	78.7
Allow access to company facilities (i.e., board rooms, photocopiers, fax machines)	70.7
Allow employees to adjust work schedules to do volunteer activities	69.8
Encourage executive and other staff to serve on volunteer boards of directors	65.0
Encourage volunteer work as a way to gain skills and experience for professional development	60.5
Permit employees paid time off to pursue volunteer activities	60.0
Count relevant volunteer work as experience for career advancement	40.0
Allow employees to take leaves of absence without pay to pursue volunteer activities	28.3
Hold volunteer fairs on company premises	27.6
Keep track of employees' volunteer activities	13.7
Offer retirement planning that promotes volunteer work	13.6
Maintain a "clearing house" of information to make employees aware of volunteer opportunities	9.3
Establish volunteer programmes for retired employees	8.3
Maintain a "skills bank" for volunteer organizations interested in recruitment	3.4

Source: The Canadian Centre for Business in the Community/The Conference Board of Canada and IMAGINE/The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, *Employee Volunteers: Business Support in the Community* (Toronto: CCBC/CCP, 1996).

The following table reports how business leaders responded when asked to rank the ways in which they see corporate volunteer initiatives paying off:

<b>Top-ranked Benefits</b>	<b>% Agree</b>
Improves relations with surrounding community	56.1
Improves corporate public image	54.6
Helps maintain a healthy community, which is essential to business	39.5
Improves employees' sense of self-worth	36.1
Improves employees' "people skills"	29.8
<b>Bottom-ranked Benefits</b>	





Increases employee job performance	6.3
Improves employee retention	4.4
Reduces absenteeism	3.4
Enhances performance management initiatives (i.e., Total Quality Management)	3.4
Improves recruitment of new employees	2.9

Source: The Canadian Centre for Business in the Community and IMAGINE/The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, *Employee Volunteers: Business Support in the Community* (Toronto: CCBC/CCP, 1996).

How can business leaders be encouraged to promote and support more corporate volunteer initiatives? One way is to make them more familiar with recent changes to the *Income Tax Act*. Until recently, businesses could receive federal tax credits for donations made to registered charities equal to a maximum 20 percent of their net annual income. This limit included income derived from taxable capital gains. In 1996, the federal government increased the charitable donation limit to 50 percent of a business' annual income and made all taxable capital gains donated to a registered charity fully tax deductible. According to the federal Minister of Finance, these changes "will encourage larger donations to charitable organizations...[and] will ensure that taxpayers making gifts of appreciated capital are able to claim tax credits for the full amount of the taxable capital gain."<sup>14</sup> Another way is simply to publicize the benefits which businesses have accrued from successful corporate volunteer initiatives.

## Community Service Learning

With less than one-fifth of all Canadians donating time to volunteer activities, there is clearly room for initiatives which aim to encourage voluntarism at a much more general level. One way to do this is through community service learning initiatives (CSL) in the public school system. CSL is typically a requirement built into a school's curriculum that students perform a specified number of hours of service to their community. The service performed is left up to the student, depending upon their aptitudes and interests.

Community service learning has two dominant sets of intellectual roots. The first is in social reformation and democratic education. Proponents of this view argue that CSL should be used to promote the personal, social and intellectual development of young people in preparation for their participation in the larger democratic community. The second set of intellectual roots sees CSL as one component of a more general approach to education called "experiential education." Proponents such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget and other education theorists stress learning as an interaction with the



environment, arguing that “development occurs as individuals strive to come up with more satisfying and complex ways to understand and act on their world.”<sup>15</sup> Most CSL programmes reflect both of these traditions, as the following description of one Ontario CSL programme shows:

This [CSL] programme specifically links our students to the broader community in which they live, and enables them to experience the role of being an active participant in the community. [This school] believes that being an educated citizen includes knowing how to contribute to society in order to make the world a better place in which to live. It is hoped that in their own learning experience our students will become more sensitive to the needs and strengths of others.<sup>16</sup>

Support for community service learning in Ontario was given a boost recently by the Royal Commission on Learning which argued that “schools must foster the healthy development of all students by harnessing the various resources of the communities they are a part of.”<sup>17</sup>

At present, 72 percent of K-8 schools, and 49 percent of Grade 9-OAC schools, offer curriculum-based service learning opportunities. Forty percent of K-8 schools, and 48 percent of Grade 9-OAC schools, offer co-curricular service learning opportunities.<sup>18</sup> Some of the more popular CSL initiatives offered at the K-8 level included environmental-recycling action clubs, student art shows, plays and concerts and peer help groups. A few of the CSL courses offered at the 9-OAC level include accounting, religious education, geography, law and physical education.

## CONCLUSION

The history of voluntarism in Canada appears to be coming full circle. In the nineteenth century, volunteers provided most of the public services which today would be considered part of our publicly-funded and administered social safety net. In the decades following the Great Depression, the private sector was eclipsed by the public in the provision of public services, although volunteers remained an important source of support. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, voluntarism is being looked to once again as cash-strapped governments search for alternative ways to provide public services.

What can governments realistically expect of voluntarism in the future? This paper has shown that it is neither reasonable nor practical to expect volunteers to actually deliver many public services. It is realistic to expect more





Canadians to donate more of their time to provide support services in organizations which deliver public services. The only way this will occur, though, is if more Canadians are exposed to volunteer activity through such things as community service learning and if the constraints to volunteering are reduced through such things as corporate volunteer initiatives. Governments can expect more Canadians to volunteer if they encourage these types of initiatives.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David P. Ross, E. Richard Shillington and the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations, *A Profile of the Canadian Volunteer* (Ottawa: NVO, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985), p.2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Rutman, "J.J. Kelso and the Development of Child Welfare," in Allan Moscovitch and Jim Albert (eds.), *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987), p.272.

<sup>5</sup> On the early functioning of the Society, see Guest and Allan Moscovitch and Jim Albert (eds.), *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Wendy Mitchinson, "Early Women's Organizations and Social Reform: Prelude to the Welfare State," in *The Benevolent State*, p.79.

<sup>7</sup> See, in general, Josephine Rekart, *Public Funds, Private Provision: the Role of the Voluntary Sector* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993); Jacqueline Ismael and Yves Vaillancourt (eds.), *Privatization and Provincial Social Services in Canada: Policy, Administration and Service Delivery* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1988); and Novia Carter, *Trends in Volunteer Support for Non-government Social Service Agencies* (Ottawa: The Canadian Council on Social Development, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Canada, Statistics Canada, *Giving Freely: Volunteers in Canada*, Cat. no. 71-535 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Ontario, Committee on Government Productivity, *Interim Report Number Three* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1971), p.50.

<sup>10</sup> Ontario, Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, *Speech from the Throne* (Toronto: The Office, 1995), p.19.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Smith and Michael Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.115.

<sup>12</sup> Canada, Statistics Canada, *Giving Freely*, p.66.

<sup>13</sup> Results of the survey were published in the joint Canadian Centre for Business in the Community/The Conference Board of Canada/IMAGINE/The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, *Employee Volunteers: Business Support in the Community* (Toronto: CCBC/CCP, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Canada, Department of Finance, *Budget Plan* (Ottawa: The Department, 1996), p.156.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin, "School-based Community Service: What We Know From Research and Theory," *Phi Delta Kappan* (June 1991), p.51.

<sup>16</sup> Upper Canada College, *General Information*, 1995-96.

<sup>17</sup> Ontario, Royal Commission on Learning, *For the Love of Learning: Report of the Royal Commission on Learning* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1994), 4:33.

<sup>18</sup> Ontario, Ministry of Education and Training, *Community Service Project Survey Draft Report* (Toronto: The Ministry, 1995).







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